

# STATE LEGISLATIVE FACT SHEET

January 2000

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U.S. Department of Transportation  
**National Highway Traffic Safety  
Administration**

**NHTSA**  
People Saving People  
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## GRADUATED DRIVER LICENSING SYSTEM

The U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) encourages states to implement a graduated driver licensing system. Easing young drivers into the traffic environment through more controlled exposure to progressively more difficult driving experiences can reduce their traffic crashes.

A significant percentage of young drivers are involved in traffic crashes and are twice as likely as adult drivers to be in a fatal crash. Sixteen-year-old drivers have crash rates that are three times more than 17-year-olds, five times greater than 18-year-olds, and twice those of 85-year-olds. The problems contributing to these higher crash rates include driving inexperience and lack of adequate driving skills; excessive driving during night-time, high-risk hours; risk-taking behavior; poor driving judgment and decision making; and drinking and driving.

To address these problems, traffic safety researchers developed a licensing system that would prolong the learning process for young novice drivers. Based on this system, NHTSA and the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) developed an entry-level driver licensing program to give young drivers more time to learn all the complex skills required to operate a vehicle. The program consists of three distinct stages, named by the type of license possessed at each stage: learner's permit, intermediate (provisional) license, and full licensure. Young drivers are required to demonstrate responsible driving behavior in each stage of licensing before advancing to the next.

### **Key Facts**

- In 1998, 4,735 young people (drivers and occupants), ages 15-19, died in motor vehicle crashes.
- Approximately 36 percent of all deaths for people ages 15-19 are from motor vehicle crashes.
- In 1998, 19 percent of the young drivers involved in fatal crashes had been drinking.
- These young drivers make up 5.3 percent of the total driving population, but constitute 9 percent of the alcohol-involved drivers in fatal crashes.
- In 1998, 62 percent of youth (ages 15-19) who died in passenger vehicles were not wearing safety belts.
- In the last two years, non-alcohol-related fatalities decreased by 2 percent for youth ages 15-19.
- In 1998, 18 percent of those who died in speed-related crashes were youth.
- States with night-time driving restrictions are associated with crash reductions of up to 60 percent during restricted hours.
- Graduated licensing has been shown to reduce crashes among young drivers.

### ***How Does Graduated Licensing Work?***

In the mid-1990s, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, National Safety Council, National Transportation Safety Board, National Committee on Uniform Traffic Laws and Ordinances (NCUTLO), and NHTSA met to establish a national model for graduated driver licensing. By establishing a national model, the various traffic safety groups hoped to provide guidelines for states considering graduated driver licensing.

The three stages of the graduated licensing system they developed include specific components and restrictions to introduce driving privileges gradually to beginning drivers. Novice drivers are required to demonstrate responsible driving behavior in each stage of licensing before advancing to the next stage.

Each stage has recommended components and restrictions for states to consider when implementing a graduated licensing system. Example components and restrictions of each stage include:

#### ***Stage 1: Learner's Permit***

- State's minimum age for a learner's permit.
- Pass vision and knowledge tests, including rules of the road, signs, and signals.
- Complete basic vehicle skills training.
- Licensed adult (at least age 21) required in the vehicle at all times.
- All occupants must wear safety belts.
- Zero alcohol while driving.
- Permit is distinctive from other driver licenses.
- Must remain crash- and conviction-free for at least six months to move to the next stage.
- Parental certification of practice hours.

#### ***Stage 2: Intermediate (Provisional) License***

- Complete Stage 1.
- State's minimum age.
- Pass a behind-the-wheel road test.
- Complete advanced driver education training (e.g., safe driving decision making, risk education, etc.).
- All occupants must wear safety belts.
- Licensed adult required in the vehicle during late-night hours (e.g., night-time driving restriction).
- Zero alcohol while driving.
- Driver improvement actions are initiated at lower point level than for regular drivers.
- Provisional license is distinctive from a regular license.
- Must remain crash- and conviction-free for at least 12 consecutive months to move to the next stage.
- Supervised practice.

#### ***Stage 3: Full Licensure***

- Complete Stage 2.
- State's minimum age.
- Zero alcohol while driving.

### ***How Many States Have a Graduated License System?***

Twenty four states have matched or exceeded all component parts of the model GDL law adopted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), and the National Safety Council (NSC). Those states are: California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, North Carolina, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Wisconsin. Forty states have changed their licensing laws that pertain to young novice drivers since 1996.

### ***How Effective is Graduated Licensing?***

Evaluations clearly show the benefits of adopting graduated licensing laws and components. Florida's GDL law resulted in a 9 percent reduction in crashes for drivers 16 and 17 years old. Ongoing research in Kentucky, Michigan, and North Carolina show a positive effect on the crash experience of teen drivers. Component parts adopted in the late 1970's and early 1980's also had positive effects. California reported a 5 percent reduction in crashes and a 10 percent reduction in traffic convictions for drivers 16 and 17. Oregon saw a 16 percent reduction in crashes for male drivers age 16 and 17.

Nova Scotia reported a 24 percent reduction in crashes involving 16 year old drivers while a preliminary report from Ontario, Canada cites a 31 percent reduction in crashes for all drivers 15 to 19 years of age.

### ***Incentive Grant Program***

On May 22, 1998, Congress passed H.R. 2400, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). TEA-21 made substantial changes to the existing Section 410 alcohol incentive grant program. States may qualify for a "Programmatic Basic Grant" if they submit materials demonstrating that they meet five out of seven grant criteria. One of these seven grant criteria is a new graduated driver's licensing system. To rely on this system as one of the criteria to qualify for a grant, a state must have a three-stage program that includes a learner's permit stage (Stage I), an intermediate (or restricted) license stage (Stage II), and a final stage, under which the driver receives an unrestricted license (Stage III). Each stage has a minimum length and threshold requirements for testing

before entering the next stage. Drivers with Stage I learner's permits and Stage II intermediate licenses must abide by the State's seat belt use laws and zero tolerance laws if they are under the age of 21, and they must remain crash- and conviction-free for the duration of the licensing phase. During Stage I, permit holders may not operate a motor vehicle at any time (day or night) unless they are accompanied by a licensed driver who is 21 years of age or older. During Stage II, drivers may not operate a motor vehicle during certain night-time hours unless they are accompanied by a licensed driver who is at least 21 years of age or covered by a state-approved exception to this restriction. These hours are to be specified by the state, and they must cover some period of time between the hours of 10:00 P.M. and 6:00 A.M. Permits and licenses issued at all three stages must be distinguished from each other.

### **Who Supports Graduated Licensing?**

The following organizations have publicly supported a graduated driver licensing system:

- Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety
- Allstate Insurance
- American Academy of Family Physicians
- American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators
- AAA
- American Automobile Manufacturers Association
- American College of Emergency Physicians
- Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety (ACTS)
- Brain Injury Association
- Centers for Disease Control
- General Federation of Women's Clubs
- Insurance Institute for Highway Safety
- International Association of Chiefs of Police
- Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)
- National Association of Governors' Highway Safety Representatives
- National Association of Independent Insurers
- National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health
- The Society of Trauma Nurses
- National Association of Orthopaedic Nurses
- National Commission Against Drunk Driving
- National Committee on Uniform Traffic Laws and Ordinances
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
- National Safety Council
- National Sheriffs' Association

- National Transportation Safety Board
- Police Executive Research Forum
- USAA Insurance

### **What Products and Services Are Available?**

- Consultation on provisions and implementation of graduated licensing systems, from AAMVA and NHTSA.
- Testimony before state legislatures, from AAMVA and NHTSA.
- *Saving Teenage Lives: The Case for Graduated Driver Licensing*. DOT HS 808 801, 1998.
- *Graduated Driver Licensing: Q&A*. DOT HS 808 856
- *Graduated Licensing System: Learning the Skill, Earning the Privilege*. 2-volume resource package, AAA Government Relations.
- *Young Drivers: The High-Risk Years*. Video, IIHS.
- A sample graduated driver licensing system law.
- *Research Agenda for an Improved Novice Driver Education Program*. Report to Congress, NHTSA, May 1994.
- Evaluation studies from Florida, California, Maryland, Oregon, and New Zealand showing the benefits of graduated licensing, from NHTSA.

### **Information Sources**

American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA)

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703-522-4200 (Fax: 703-522-1553)

Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety

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Elizabeth Russell, Director of Administration

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Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS)

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Allan F. Williams, Ph.D.

703-247-1500 (Fax: 703-247-1678)

National Association of Independent Insurers (NAII)

2600 River Road

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***The reports and additional information are available from your State Highway Safety Office, the NHTSA Regional Office serving your State, or from NHTSA Headquarters, Traffic Safety Programs, ATTN: NTS-32, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20590; 202-366-6948.***

